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Samarra and Kirkuk: A strategic city update

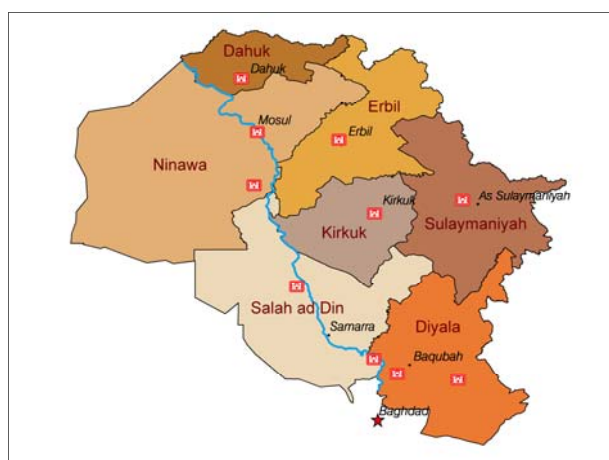
by LuAnne Fantasia
Gulf Region North district

COB Speicher — In the city of Samarra, Iraq, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has completed 40 of the 45 planned projects in the Iraq Reconstruction Program.

"We're joining the Iraqi people in re-constructing their country," said Col. Michael F. Pfenning, commander of the Corps' Gulf Region North district, or GRN. "We're executing construction and project management in a dynamic environment in terms of security, market capability, material delivery challenges, quality of workmanship, and immediate need of the Iraqi people."

As one of four strategic cities in Pfenning's seven-province, 66,000 square mile area of responsibility, Samarra is steadily making a comeback to its days as a trade center of the region. Although not a Reconstruction Program project, Iraqi media reported last week that reconstruction of the Shi'a-venerated al-Askariya shrine in Samarra will begin after Ramadan, funded by the European Union and the Government of Iraq. The shrine and mosque of the 10th and 11th Imams—Ali al-Hadi and Hassan al-Askari—was destroyed in a bomb explosion in February of last year.

With a population of approximately 200,000, Samarra lies on the east bank of the Tigris River, and was the capital of the Muslim world for 56 years in the 9th cen-



Gulf Region North district encompasses 66,000 square miles in seven of Iraq's 18 provinces, north and east of Baghdad. Its four strategic cities are Mosul, Samarra, Kirkuk and Baqubah. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has project and construction management responsibility for the Iraq Reconstruction Program; and it assists Iraq's provincial governments as they assume responsibility for managing their infrastructure development, and the capability to sustain it.

ture. Today the ancient city benefits from upgrades to its electrical grid, and water and sewage projects, totaling more than \$37 million—in both the Iraq Reconstruction Program and the Commander's Emergency Response Program.

- There are nine electrical projects budgeted for this city of 200,000, with eight of those completed and one still ongoing; with most of the homes and businesses receiving power at least 12 hours a day. This meets the goal at the time of

Iraq's sovereignty in 2004 and the simultaneous start of the Iraq Reconstruction Program, which was to increase hours of power in Iraqi homes to an average of 12 hours of electricity daily.

- The city pumps river water to treatment facilities and then into the city via main water lines. It has no operating water department to maintain or repair the existing system, which is only 20 percent operational. With no sewage system in Samarra, citizens rely on septic tanks and open drainage. To help alleviate these problems, over \$5 million is budgeted in public works and water projects; with nine projects finished and one left to start.

- Recently a contract was awarded to repair an existing pump station, install new pumps, and install a new rural water line by extending the existing network located in Samarra. The new water network extension of 21,000 meters will provide raw water from the Tigris River to nearly the entire population of Samara.

The city of Kirkuk has always been "strategic"; whether as a crossroad for three empires; or since its first oil gusher in 1927; or for its historic reputation as a city where people of different ethnic groups lived together in peace.

Today the city's population is well over 750,000. The city receives a helping hand from the Iraq Reconstruction Program with 74 projects; 62 complete; eight ongoing; and four that remain to start. This effort totals over \$218 million in reconstruction projects in this city where, according to current estimates oil fields produce up to one million barrels of oil a day, or almost half of all Iraqi oil exports.

Pfenning said a large part of the mission here is capacity-building, or enabling Iraq's capability to sustain. "Our Provincial Reconstruction Teams [PRT] work directly with their local Government of Iraq representatives daily...on government, legal and business processes."

- Electrical power has risen from four to 16 hours daily, with the installation of new generators at the power plant in February of last year.

- Of the 12 planned projects to improve the oil infrastructure in Kirkuk, eight are complete; three are ongoing and one remains to start.

- There is no sewage system in Kirkuk and citizens rely on septic tanks and open drainage. There are eight projects funded through three different sources; three are completed; four are ongoing; and one planned but not started.

- Forty-six facilities and transportation projects are planned for Kirkuk; with 43 complete; one ongoing; and two planned but not started.

"In the United States, we don't have to extend the post-construction timeline on projects as we do here," Pfenning added. "Here, we continue the coaching, teaching and mentoring the young Iraqi government. Each Iraqi Governorate knows and trusts one of our local engineers on the PRT or in one of our area offices as their local 'go to' person."

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